SCHOOL SAFETY PROJECT

On December 14, 2012 Adam Lanza, 20, entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in New Town, Connecticut and shot 20 children and 6 adults dead. This tragedy impacted every child, parent, teacher, administrator, and community member around the world. This was the second deadliest school shooting in history, after the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre. Lanza shot his way through locked glass doors at the front of the school. His victims were innocent five, six, and seven year olds and the dedicated teachers that cared for these students. The news was devastating and incomprehensible.

The Sandy Hook Elementary shooting was an alarming wake up call for school safety. This elementary school had plans, drills, procedures, training, and communication in place. How could this happen? At the School District of Flambeau this tragedy pushed school safety issues to the forefront. We know that fear is best eliminated by education, communication and preparedness. Our district administrator immediately called the staff together for a meeting to discuss student reactions to this crisis. He then asked for volunteers to be on the school safety committee. I volunteered to take a leadership role on this committee.

Wisconsin has been required to conduct fire drills for the past 40 years. These drills are required to occur once per month. In 2007, it became a law in Wisconsin to practice an evacuation drill to a safe location in the case of a tornado or other hazards. These drills are required to be carried out by school officials twice per school year. The school board must maintain for at least 7 years a record of each fire drill, tornado or other hazard drill, and school safety drill conducted. Many school also conduct intruder drills to help pupils prepare for violence in a school building. In 2009 Wisconsin Act 28 and Act 309 modified the statutes to require specific components for school safety plans and to establish minimum standards for training and practice drills. According to school safety researchers Shana R. Lewis and Kirk D. Strang, school officials need to be able to reassure the public that they have complied with the statutory requirements and mandates in the context of school shootings and other deadly hazards.

The recent tornado in Moore, Oklahoma was another wake up call for schools to keep their safety plans current and to practice these safety drills regularly with staff and students. The tornado that twisted through this community on May 20, 2013 killed 24 people. Seven of these precious lives were elementary students. The tornado wiped out two elementary schools in its path. This tornado was rated an EF5, which classifies it at the top of the five-point scale. School officials stated that the teachers were well prepared for this type of disaster and many students were saved because of heroic teachers and solid safety plans.

School boards are now also required to adopt a school safety plan by May 26, 2013. The safety plans must be created with active participation of local law enforcement officers, fire fighters, school administrators, teachers, pupil services professionals, and mental health professionals. This plan must contain general guidelines and procedures for emergency prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and methods for conducting mandatory drills. The school board must also designate employees for school safety plan training, determine the frequency of training, and develop a plan unique to the school district’s specific need for safety. This plan must be reviewed every 3 years by the school board.

Wisconsin Statute Section 120.13(35) authorizes school boards to adopt rules for individuals that enter or remain in the school building. These requirements call for individuals to identify themselves and sign in when entering the school building. Some boards can choose to prohibit visitors during the school day. Parents may claim that they have a right to enter their children’s school. However, courts have consistently held the rights to be controlled by the school board’s authority and power to manage and control the school. Other school boards decide to encourage the public to visit the school buildings, but require them to seek approval ahead of time. Most schools require visitors to register at the office with a receptionist when they enter the school building.

Wisconsin Act 309 also requires the Department of Public Instruction by 2010 to develop a model school policy on bullying by pupils. This policy must include the all of the following:

1. A definition of bullying.
2. A prohibition on bullying.
3. A procedure for reporting bullying that permits reports to be made confidentially.
4. A prohibition against pupil retaliation against another pupil for reporting an incident of bullying.
5. A procedure for investigating reports of bullying.
6. A requirement that school district officials and employees report incidents of bullying and indentify the persons to whom the reports must be made.
7. A list of disciplinary alternatives for pupils that engage in bullying.
8. An identification of school-related events to which the policy applies.
9. An identification of the property owned, leased, or used by the school district on which the policy applies.
10. An identification of the vehicles used for pupil transportation of which the policy applies.

DPI must have a model education and awareness program on bullying on it’s website. Each school district must adopt a policy that prohibits bullying by students. The school board must provide a copy of this policy to anyone that requests it and distribute it annually to all pupils enrolled in the school and their parents or guardians. The fourth Wednesday in September is Bullying Awareness Day. **(*School Law*; rights and responsibilities of students and staff, teacher liability, ethics and law, staff safety handbooks/ *Facilities*; plans and budgets, design and construction, operations and maintenance, health and safety, disaster preparedness, code and legal guidelines/ *Human Resources*; community support/ *Finance*; budget options/*School Community*; integrated services, crisis management/*Research*; evaluating and applying*/ Learner Centered Leadership;* long range strategic plans/**

For my project I looked at our current safety plan and compare it to other school districts in our area. I provided leadership in research for best practices in the area of school safety. I met with administrators to analyze our current plan and revised it for improvement. I submitted a new, revised safety plan to the district administrator for review. In the fall, we will gather key community people together and finalize our new safety plan.

I also investigated ways to make our building safer. These safety investigations included installing safety latches on all of the classroom doors, hanging shades on the inside door windows, installing a panic button, and potentially redesigning our existing entrance into the school. Currently, we enter off to the far side of the office and visitors can easily bypass the office staff when they enter the building. I researched a locked entrance to the school from 9:00 to 3:00. Now our building is open to the public all day long. We also discussed the need for badge identification, a fence at the back entrance of the school, lanyard passes for all visitors, and a group text messaging service to all parents. **(*Leadership*; servant, moral collaboration, organization vision, context for leadership, public school history and philosophy, safe, effective environment, effective communication/ *Decision Making*; processes and theories, role of power and influence, consensus, long range strategic plans, problem solving strategies, fairness and ethics/ *Facilities*; plans and budgets, design and construction, operations and maintenance, health and safety, disaster preparedness, code and legal guidelines, trends in facilities/ *School Law*; rights and responsibilities of students and staff, teacher liability, ethics and law, staff safety handbooks/ *Principalship*; role and history, manager vs. leader, role in community, role in finances)**

According to the Center for Education and Employment Law, there are several options for increasing the security measures at the entrance of the school building. The option that you choose will be influence by factors such as budget and school history. Some of these security measures include metal detectors, closed circuit television, security guards, card readers, and biometrics. At a New Jersey High School students are given smart cards. These cards allow administrators to control specific areas the students can access. They keep track of student movement throughout the day. Administrators can keep track of bathroom and computer usage as well as gymnasium access. In addition these cards can be used for lunch accounts and library cards. Biometric devices include fingerprint readers and eye scanning devices. Tutor Time, one of the nations largest providers of childcare, has installed biometric fingerprinting devices at all of their corporate locations.

Throughout the process of analyzing our school safety plans at Flambeau, a discussion about our entrance to the building kept resurfacing. Our entrance is just not safe and secure. Big measures had to be taken. Our committee decided to redesign and build a new entrance to our PreK-12 School District of Flambeau facility. We hired an architect to design a new entrance so that all visitors would have to flow past the office checkpoint, receive a visitor’s pass, and then proceed to other areas of the school facility. An intercom system will be installed for added security. HSR Associates designed the plans, and the projected cost is $85,767.00. Construction will begin as soon as school is out for the summer.

One of the best ways to prepare your staff for an intruder is to practice safety drills routinely and in various circumstances. I am part of a leadership team that planned our first code red since the Sandy Hook shooting. After the drill we immediately sat down and revised the procedures for the next drill. A debriefing with the entire staff helped to make changes to ensure the safety of our students.

Much emphasis has been placed on test scores and common core standards, but until our children are safe and feel that they are safe, learning cannot take place. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs puts safety second in the pyramid. Only food, water, and sleep come before our need to feel safe. Flambeau is committed to the safety of the children and its community members. This project will ensure our safety procedures are proactive, current, constantly reevaluated, and provide a sense of security to all of the individuals that enter our building.

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